CHILD STUDY

The Fears of Childhood

By DAVID MITCHELL

Report of Conference on Parenthood

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CONTENTS—NOVEMBER, 1925

PAGE

The Fears of Childhood..... 3
By Dr. David Mitchell

The Parent and the Child in the World Today 5
Report of the Conference on Parenthood

Editorial—The Response to the Conference... 10

The Institute 10

Freedom for the Child..... 11
Report of the Dinner

A National Council of Parental Education... 11

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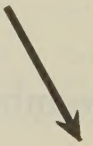

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CHILD STUDY

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The Fears of Childhood

By David Mitchell

IN our modern civilization there are few, if any, situations where fear can serve a desirable purpose. There are situations in which caution is necessary, but in our wish to avoid tragedy or calamity for ourselves and our children our procedure should be to instill a proper prudence and not a paralyzing emotion. Fear exerts a devastating influence on healthy, normal development, and to permit it—to say nothing of encouraging it—is a crime against childhood and an outrage on children's personalities.

Granted, then, that fear is not only useless but actually detrimental to the growth of the child, the problem of understanding and meeting childish fears and of replacing them with more constructive emotions, is an important one. Every effort should be made first to understand the reason for the fear, and then by arranging the stimuli and setting the situation new habits of thinking and feeling in relation to these situations will be developed. To a large extent fear reactions a r e h a b i t forms of response and are subject to development and amenable to re-education as in all other habits.

The mother was both fortunate and wise who was able to say, in response to a question concerning children's fears, "My children have never been afraid of anything." Both the mother and the father of these children had avoided the occasions in which the fear response might be set up. In the days of infancy the youngsters were not subjected to undue noise or sudden disturbance. Their life was guarded so that the simple things which would arouse the emotion of fear were not permitted to happen. Their early days were undisturbed and by no process of association were the children made afraid of situations which should be only a joy and satisfaction.

When their tendencies to explore might lead them into dangers two practices were c o n s i s t e n t l y observed. First and most important was the avoidance of any threat of a "policeman," a "bogey man," or a "dark closet." Second, in all these situations where pain would tend to develop an uncertainty or fear, the parents of these two children took the time to point out carefully what were the significant factors. If it was a burn, the hot object was studied

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of the Child Study Association
begin work this month

There is still time

To join groups meeting at Headquarters:

Adolescence, Infancy and Early Childhood, The Pre-School Child, Parents and Sex Education, General Child Study (Leadership), Sex Education for Young Mothers, Mental Hygiene

or

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LECTURES AND CONFERENCES

have been scheduled for the season 1925-1926

Write to the Child Study Association of America, Inc., 54 W. 74 St., New York City, for program of year's work and full information concerning study groups.

and ways of handling it were carefully and clearly shown.

The experiments of Watson seem to show clearly that the child has very few original fears. A loud noise or the withdrawal of support will cause a fear reaction in a very young child, and a situation causing pain or discomfort he naturally tends to avoid. All the other painful fears of children seem to be acquired, either directly through the teaching and example of those about them or indirectly through association.

We are all familiar with some of the commoner methods of teaching fears. Many parents, in order to compel quiet, haste, or prompt compliance with demands, tell children that they will hand them over to the policeman, that they will take them to the doctor, that the "bogey man" will get them, that they will go away and leave them alone, or put them in a dark closet. Momentarily the plan seems to work. The parent is satisfied with the immediate obedience of the child, not realizing that unfortunate emotional trends may result.

The youngest child of a family, in taking a psychological test, was asked to hand the psychologist a knife. A preliminary part of the test was to close the door. Instead, the child pushed it open and went out. For a moment it seemed only a misunderstanding of directions, but looking out of the door the psychologist saw the youngster running as fast as possible down the corridor. He followed her, found her in an agony of weeping and was able only with difficulty to comfort her and regain her co-operation.

Finally the story came out. Her mother had told her that if she ever touched a knife or razor her fingers would be cut off. In the simple test in which she was asked to handle a knife, the force of the emotional disturbance caused by this threat displayed itself. One can only guess how many unhappy hours this acquired fear had caused her.

Children may be taught fear by warnings as well as by threats. The child who is told repeatedly not to do a thing because something terrible might happen, learns to hesitate and to avoid doing many really educative things. The parent who shows excessive worry over the possibilities of the burglar's entry, the street car accident, the ducking in the pond, or the fall from the tree, will undoubtedly bring about the same unfortunate habit in the child.

Some fears are the result of actual painful experiences. Often the occasion giving rise to them may be forgotten by both parent and child, but the emotion will persist and the cause remain undiscovered until a thorough investigation is made. A five-year-old had an unreasoning fear of cats, screaming in terror whenever one approached. The parents could give no explanation for it. "It must have been born with her," they said. The psychologist, watching her expression during the conversation on cats, noticed a scar just below the right ear. It was faint, and for a time the parents could not remember how it had been caused. Finally one of them recalled that at about the age of one year a cat had jumped on the child and scratched her, leaving several marks. They then remembered that prior to this incident the child had fondled the family cat. This natural tendency to play with the cat has been inhibited completely and in its place the habit of fear set up.

Fears may be the result of association rather than direct education. Joe went into a paroxysm of fear whenever an animal approached. In trying to find out the cause it was discovered that when a baby he had been terrified by a loud noise and that a dog had come into the room at the same time. He had associated his natural fear of sudden noise with the dog, and had continued to be afraid of both.

The advocate of the "heroic" method of treating fears would have felt that Joe should be induced to walk out bravely and touch a dog. Such a procedure is undesirable in view of the fundamental psychological make-up. The natural result from an arbitrary external pressure is the development of a resistance to suggestion from the authority. At the same time nothing is done to break down the habits of thinking and feeling which the earlier experiences had produced.

Nor should Joe's fear be ridiculed. Such a procedure cannot be too severely condemned. Children are extremely sensitive and particularly so about their fears. Ridicule only increases this natural sensitiveness and leads to concealment and then to unfortunate suppression and exaggeration. With a clear understnading of the psychological processes set up and shown in the fear reaction, the child should be treated with gentleness and his fears brought into the light of day so that an effective handling will be possible.

What really happened in the treatment of Joe's case was this. He was placed in the nursery, from the window of which he could see a dog. At the

(*Continued on page* 13)

The Parent and the Child in the World Today

The Conference of the Child Study Association Calls Forth Many Challenging Ideas

Reported by Helen A. Storey

NEARLY fifteen hundred people gathered in the Grand Ball Room of the Hotel Waldorf-Astoria in New York City on October 26th, to open the first public conference dedicated to the parent and the child. "The dawn of a new epoch is at hand," said Dean J. E. Russell, as chairman of the meeting, "when experts are called together to consider how to help mothers and fathers bring up their children."

The Family of Today

The three addresses of the morning centered around the family. Dr. Ethel Puffer Howes of Smith College gave a carefully thought out analysis of the position of the mother in the home. The mother's part consists not only in knowing when to administer milk, orange juice, spinach and cod-liver oil, but how to create a background of justice, sympathy and serenity.

But how can the mother diffuse serenity unless she has first achieved it herself? Too often a woman develops her talents throughout a fearless, unconscious youth only to find that with marriage and motherhood the intrinsic worth of her individual interest seems to have vanished. To help solve for the educated, intelligent woman this seeming conflict between individuality and family, Smith College has recently undertaken a project of research, the purpose and scope of which Dr. Howes described.

What most children need today is to have the mother sincerely interested in something worthy apart from them. We can hardly measure how much sensitive children suffer from the intense, sustained concentration upon them of conscientious, otherwise mentally unoccupied mothers. It is in the sense of freedom to think their own long, long thoughts of youth that young things grow and blossom. The mother should be happily occupied in her own concerns, but *ready* to give the child what he needs.

The position of the father in the home came in for consideration by Dr. Elton G. Mayo of the University of Pennsylvania, who said that in working up the subject he had been surprised to find that we do not know what father, mother and home really mean, except in their narrower biological significance. He traced the historical development of the family and showed that there has always been an endeavor to systematize the relation between men and women, to guard against its breaking down into a mere casual getting together. He pointed out that the position of the father in the home depends largely upon the attitude of society toward this sexual relationship.

Mental hygiene seems to show that it is nobody's duty to shut the doors and stay in the home. Each member of the family must have an active working relation with the society about him, independent of the relation to the home. This has always been accepted as a matter of course for the father, but has not always been true of the mother and children.

Dr. Beatrice Hinkle then discussed the newer relations of men and women. At the present time the self-assertiveness of women is dominating. The woman has begun to find outlets outside the home,—in women's clubs, study groups, and paying positions. She has begun to function inde-

Recording the Conference

IN the limited space available in Child Study for a report of the Conference, it has of course been impossible to do more than touch upon the substance of the addresses. Some of the interesting points made by the speakers have been reluctantly omitted; examples, case histories, and discussions could not be included.

Fortunately the proceedings of the Conference were taken by a stenotypist and will be available shortly. By this means the value of the Conference will be extended to those who were not able to come, and it will be made more permanent for those who were fortunate enough to be present.

pendently of the family and to regard it more or less impersonally.

With this change in attitude there has arisen an appearance of carelessness and disregard of the primary claims of children which has created alarm in the minds of many men, who fail to see that this disturbing condition is the direct outcome of the masculine methods and inferior attitudes which completely dominated the past in a wholly masculine world.

The beginnings of a new relationship between men and women, however, are already in evidence. There is an honesty and frankness in the attitude of women towards men which is entirely new, and instead of pretending to be devoted mothers because that was the role expected by men, numbers of women have gained the courage to admit their limitations and to demand that men share the family responsibility; and the men on their side are exhibiting a greater inclination to consider their part of the duty.

The human race repeats with unending monotony the same mistakes, the same stupidities, generation after generation. Why? The generations are bound to each other by unbreakable psychic bonds, so that before self-consciousness arises in the child, he is already conditioned to the emotional immaturities and conflicts of his parents. The new relations between men and women demand an emotional maturity on the part of each person, and it is this changed attitude that inevitably must produce a great effect upon the children.

The Family and the Community

THE discussions of the afternoon centered about the family and the community. Mrs. Mary Kingsbury Simkhovitch was chairman. The nursery school, a new and important element in the community, was the first topic to be considered. Dr. Helen T. Woolley gave a clear and convincing presentation of the manner in which the nursery school was responding to new needs, of the child, the home and the educational system.

In meeting the needs of the very young child, the nursery school has certain obvious advantages. It can furnish expert guidance in both the physical and educational fields. It can give the little child social life and activity. We have made the mistake of thinking that children under five or six are unsocial—the nursery school has found that this is not true.

Should the mother and child be together all of the twenty-four hours of the day until the child is five years old? Dr. Woolley does not think so. She showed how difficult it is for the mother who has the unrelieved responsibility of a little child to maintain a right relationship. Either she dominates, makes the child too dependent on her; or she is oversolicitous and fearful and communicates her fear to the child; or other unfortunate relationships may be established. The right of the mother to a life of her own is coming to be recognized. Children, too, have a right to their own lives—they should have friends outside the family and come more and more into association with children of their own age.

Dr. Woolley also pointed out the importance of the nursery school as a laboratory for the training of young girls who will in all probability some day become mothers.

In a discussion of the family and society, the adolescent in his process of getting away from the family comes in for consideration. Dr. Leta S. Hollingworth, in the second address of the afternoon, handled this subject in a thorough-going and forceful manner. She showed how necessarily painful the break of the adolescent boy or girl from home ties must be, since long established habits, both of the parent and the child, come into conflict with urges occurring in the adolescent organism.

We need to recognize more completely the necessity for *psychological weaning*. Primitive races celebrated publicly the entrance of the adolescent into adult life. We leave it to the boy and girl to disconnect themselves from emotional and economic dependence upon the home.

How can parents help in this psychological weaning? The beginning must be made in early childhood. If the little child is taught to be self-reliant, he is less likely to be "homesick" when he grows older and leaves home. Homesickness interferes with vocation, with marriage and with general progress toward complete adulthood.

What about the mother whose children are passing through this adolescent phase? Society has led her to think of the rearing of children as her life work. When she feels her job slipping away, it is natural for her to take as firm a grip as she can. The father would do the same with his medical practice or his grocery trade. The mother should begin early to cultivate interests extraneous from her children and should build up an attitude of foresight, insight and self-control.

Dr. Ernest R. Groves of Boston University then spoke on the family as a co-ordinator of community

forces. He said that there is always a temptation to think of the family in static terms, while in reality it is changing as rapidly as any part of our life and is handing over many of its former functions to the community. It still retains, however, its importance as a center for the interpretation of experience—not only of the father and mother, but also of the child. It should be a place for guidance, stimulation and comradeship.

To those institutions which are assuming functions that once were the family's the parent has the right to make suggestions. The family has discovered that the child needs out-door freedom, time to discover himself and a recognition of his individuality. The school is in danger of forgetting this.

The parent has advice to give the church, industry, and the newspaper as they take over the functions of the family. Religion should be kept simple; industry must exist primarily for service to mankind; the newspaper must not make divorce fascinating and crime adventurous—these are some of the admonitions Dr. Groves feels that the family should give outside agencies.

Parents and the New Psychology

THE morning session of Tuesday, October 27th, was devoted to the consideration of the new psychology in its relation to different stages of child development. Mrs. Howard Gans presided. The first speaker, Dr. D. A. Thom of the Massachusetts Division of Mental Hygiene, discussed the importance of the early years of childhood. Dr. Thom pointed out that parents often have little comprehension of the underlying forces that account for the temper tantrums, fears and personality twists of the child. Interest and love alone are not enough to insure success in handling children. The very love that the parent bears may be the stumbling block that prevents successfully fulfilling the obligation of parenthood.

The important thing for parents and teachers to realize is that the child has a mental life. He has plans, hopes and ambitions, doubts, fears and misgivings, joys and sorrows. The trial and error method of dealing with undesirable personality traits, based on an incomplete understanding of the child's mental and emotional life, often alleviates one defect only to replace it by another.

Dr. Thom then showed how mental hygiene by educating parents in an understanding of childhood helps in the adjustment of the child to its environment.

Dr. Marion Kenworthy, the second speaker in the morning session, discussed the transition from childhood to youth. She emphasized the need of prevention, rather than cure. Many of the problems of later life begin during early childhood.

The parent too often tries to fulfil his own frustrated desires in the life of his child, forcing him into a vocation for which he is not adapted. Or the child's fitness for a vocation is judged from his physical and mental qualities, without taking into account his emotional equipment.

In this age of divorce we find that emphasis is placed on the evils of breaking up the family. Perhaps a greater evil than this is to bring up a youngster in a home where there are continual mental conflicts. Here there are often more vicious elements of dissatisfaction and irritation to the child than those involved in the separation of the parents.

Dr. Frankwood E. Williams, in his address on "Confronting the World" or the adjustments of later adolescence, aroused a great deal of discussion. He said that the future of the boy or girl depends upon his success in meeting two main problems: emancipation from the home, and the establishment of hetero-sexuality.

Home, school and social life seem banded together to prevent the establishment of these two things. When the boy shows an increasing gruffness, a lack of consideration of others, an increasing intolerance of other children, particularly the younger children in the family, an increasing secretiveness, a resistance to advice, a tendency to scoff at sentiment, a weeping mother and a storming father are often the result. The parent should understand that while these things in themselves may seem alarming, the general tendency is healthy. If the child remains thoroughly obedient, then the parents should be alarmed.

Better smashed cars, broken bones and alcohol on the breath than that the boy fail to accomplish his emancipation from the home. The extent to which these experiences go will be in proportion to the resistance which the boy meets with at home. His objective will be safely attained in proportion to the co-operation he receives. Normal parents will have confidence in his ultimate success. They will sit upon the sidelines, observing, understanding and guiding what is going on.

The adolescent has only four or five years in all his life to establish his hetero-sexuality. Otherwise it will be accomplished in a normal way. We hinder the boy in this objective by

forcing on him unhealthy ideals. We teach him to treat all women as he would his mother or sister, to place women on pedestals and consider them as fragile, delicate things. This may interfere with his emotional life, and may even drive him to prostitution and to abnormal sex expression. Equally bad ideals are given to girls in regard to the care they must use in protecting themselves from the onslaughts of men. Let boys and girls know the truth about each other, and teach them the principles of fair play.

Teachers and the Changing Education

THE session Tuesday afternoon, under the chairmanship of Dr. Patty S. Hill, began with an address by Dr. Francis Mitchell Froelicher, President of the Progressive Education Association. His subject was "Training Teachers to See the Whole Child."

In order to see the whole child we must first understand the child in the different parts of his makeup. There are various methods of helping the teacher to do this: intelligence tests, health tests and tests of character which try to get an objective appraisal of the child's moral and social qualities.

But it is necessary not only to analyze the component parts of a child's makeup, but also to provide the proper atmosphere in which he may reveal himself. Children, especially, find it difficult to express themselves. The school should have an atmosphere of learning rather than teaching, with the teacher relatively quiet and the children doing most of the talking and activity.

Dr. W. T. Root continued the subject in a discussion of the individual in the group. Agencies which destroy individuality multiply daily. One of the most difficult problems of parents and teachers is the individualizing of the personality in the face of crowd psychology.

One would naturally expect education to develop rationality and individuality to offset the shallow, infantile emotionalism and uncritical suggestibility of the group-mind. But we find to our alarm that the well-to-do, during the last ten years, have gradually deserted the cause of general education, seeking relief in the private school. Meanwhile the group in the public school class has grown larger and administrative routine has become more highly standardized.

The failure to clarify the problem of individual needs has been due largely to muddled ideas regarding learning. Few things should be learned by rote. It would be much more to the point first to find the interest of the individual and then give him the sources of information, to see if he can find, select, digest and apply these facts.

With certain children, one of the most unfortunate effects of the group is the development of attitudes of fear, timidity, stage-fright and negative self-feeling. Some children can stand the effect of hurried stock criticism publicly administered. The majority, however, are whipped and bullied mentally into a subservient attitude.

To make any program of individualization a success, the teacher must be pragmatic in her views; be wholesomely agnostic; and have sufficient experimental technique so that she can carry on a sustained problem in education. She must be sufficiently well educated to be unafraid to confess ignorance. She must have a thorough knowledge of the psychology of learning. Finally, she must have a rich philosophical background, with a keen appreciation of individualized aesthetic values.

The final address of the afternoon was given by Dr. William H. Kilpatrick and was concerned with newer meanings of discipline from the standpoint of both parents and teachers.

We are gradually outgrowing the old idea that each wrong-doing must be punished, just because it is wrong and has been done. Punishment properly looks forward and not backward. We should punish not because the child does wrong, but in order to help him grow better.

There is a notion still stirring that childhood is not a time of real living, but at best a preparation for living. This is a mistake; life up to twenty-one is not a waste period of preparation for adulthood. Each part of life is valuable, and if a child grows during one stage he is better prepared to grow during the next stage.

How do we want the child to grow? As he gets older, we want him to increase his outlook and insight into the possibilities of life; to develop stronger tendencies to hold to the good and reject the evil; to grow in techniques of control and ways of accomplishing his ends. We want him to learn to control his environment and be able to change it.

Discipline, then, should be directed towards these ends. What is to be our technique for discipline? Many people look out upon the world with the idea that unless punishments are applied or prizes given no one will have an inducement to do the right thing. These advocates of the "hard-boiled" theory look upon the child as essentially

bad and do not believe that he would come to love the good and the right for its own sake. Another inadequate point of view holds that all that is necessary is to build habits, to make children do things. If they do them often enough they will grow into them.

Intelligent discipline takes account of the psychology of habit. We learn not everything we practice, but the things we practice with success. We learn not to do what we practice with failure. The child therefore must have the opportunity to practice good qualities under conditions that make him glad when he succeeds and sorry when he fails.

It is possible to use punishment occasionally to advantage to prevent the child from doing undesirable things. But if we punish him he may regret that he has done wrong, or he may regret being caught, or he may regret that he stayed at home and took the punishment. The important thing is, where is the regret located?

Activity under wise guidance is almost certain to produce the results we want.

Leisure and Recreation

The Wednesday morning session, under the chairmanship of Dr. Lee K. Frankel, Vice-President of the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, considered recreation. The first speaker was Mrs. Henry Moskowitz, who spoke on "Vacations as Educational Opportunities."

Mrs. Moskowitz emphasized the responsibility of parents to keep closely in touch with their children during vacation time. The day has passed when we can move out into the country and feel that our child will be all right because he has plenty of time to play outdoors. Children need companionship and guidance through the long summer days. Nor are summer camps an ideal solution unless the parent works with the camp director and keeps in close touch with camp activities. The summer play schools carried on by the Child Study Association are a demonstration of how parent and child may work together through vacation time, and how the summer may be intelligently used to contribute to the life of the child later on.

Dr. Miriam Van Waters, Referee of the Juvenile Court in Los Angeles, gave her viewpoint of youth and leisure. Any modern study of leisure must take in the problem of alcohol; the manufactured, commercialized thrill of baseball; the movie, the theater and prostitution. Nearly all our leisure activities have been placed under regulation, more or less.

To the adolescent leisure is very important. It should mean opportunity to bring the diverse trends of his personality into an organized whole. It should provide an emotional outlet by stimulating his creative power. The passive thrill is dangerous. Symphonies and dramas are no better in this respect for the boy or girl than baseball and the movies—all of them arouse emotions for which they provide no outlets.

In adolescence there is a supreme need for a vocation. We need inspired leaders who will help boys and girls give expression to their creative powers.

Dr. John M. Cooper of the Catholic University gave an interesting paper on the effect of machine-made recreation on family life. The primary biological and social function of the home is child-education, child-training, child-rearing. For this a *sine qua non* is personal contact by day and by night, over many years, of parent with child—a contact which should be, as far as possible, an active rather than a passive one, arising from shared activities, enterprises and responsibilities. In how far has machine-made recreation tended to hold parent and child together in play activties or to keep them apart?

Considering the movie, the auto and the radio, Dr. Cooper came to the conclusion that the effect of the movie was, almost entirely, unfavorable to family life. The auto's effect has been mixed, both separating and uniting the family circle, but on the whole tending to unify family life because it has revived the old custom of family outings and picnics and has made possible the home in the suburb. The radio, so far, has been an unmixed blessing to family life. Although it should probably be classified as passive play it has contributed notably to bringing play back into the house.

The Parent's Outlook on Life

It seemed a fitting close to the conference to consider the parents' outlook on life. Dr. John Lovejoy Elliott was chairman of this final session. The first address, by Dr. George A. Coe, touched upon the difficult problem of religious education. with the divisive aspect of religion? Is it not time for parents to bestir themselves to protect their children from everything that inherently tends to postpone friendliness among all men?

(*Continued on page* 12)

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The Response to the Conference

That curious feeling of leaving the present and living for a few moments in the future came to many who attended the recent Conference of the Child Study Association on Parenthood. It seemed incredible that in this present day and age a thousand people and more should have met together to consider seriously and scientifically, under the guidance of experts, one of the commonest and most-taken-for-granted relationships in the world —that of parent and child.

The growing feeling that the education of parents, both future and present, is a legitimate part of a real preparation for life was definitely shown in the response of several universities and colleges to the Conference on Parenthood. Dr. Patty Hill of Teachers College, while acting as chairman at one of the sessions of the Conference, announced from the platform that she had closed her classes for three days and had advised her students to attend. All the students in Teachers College were officially given the opportunitity to attend the Conference. The Department of Euthenics of Vassar had a large representation, while many students of Union Theological Seminary were evident in the audience and at the Dinner.

The student element, however, was by no means the only one. There were a great many parents, a large number of teachers, and many social workers in various fields.

That the serious discussion of problems of parenthood touches a responsive note in the public opinion of today was shown by the complete representation of metropolitan dailies at the press table, as well as requests for material from many newspapers in other cities. Newspapers of widely divergent views and audiences printed feature stories on different phases of the Conference, varying from opinions on spanking to serious, accurate accounts of the recent developments in the field of parental education.

Another interesting development has been that representatives of agencies doing excellent work toward educating fathers and mothers to a better understanding of their children have been able to confer together recently for a week, comparing their findings and techniques and expressing opinions based on their practical experience. One of the definite results of this round-table conference has been the organization of a National Council of Parental Education, which will form a permanent clearing house for projects and publications in the field of parental education.

The wide-spread and growing desire of fathers and mothers to enlist the aid of scientists in bringing up their children seems a far cry from the little group of mothers who thirty-five years ago wanted to know more about child nature. Yet it was they who laid one of the cornerstones of the rapidly growing structure of intelligent and enlightened parenthood.

The Institute

Eight days of intensive training in the technique of organizing and carrying on study groups were given by the Child Study Association at their new headquarters from October 27 to November 7. One hundred and twenty people registered and much interest was shown in the presentations and discussions.

Among the features of the program were demonstration study groups on Infancy and Early Childhood, Adolescence, Sex Education; visits to schools and clinics; a consideration of how parents may participate in child guidance clinics by Dr. Dudley D. Schoenfeld; a discussion of the Nursery School and its aid to parents in the early education of their children under the leadership of Dr. Helen T. Woolley; also a presentation of methods and materials for study groups by different members of the Child Study Association. At the final session the discussion, under the leadership of Dr. Bess V. Cunningham and Dr. Ruth Andrus, centered about methods of co-operation between lay groups and academic institutions.

Freedom for the Child—What Does It Mean?

Nearly One Thousand Attend Dinner of the Child Study Association

THE dinner of the Child Study Association took place in the Waldorf-Astoria on the last night of the Conference—Wednesday, October 28. Between nine hundred and one thousand were served.

The addresses which followed the dinner centered around the topic "Freedom for the Child—What Does it Mean?" Dr. David Saville Muzzey of Columbia University acted as chairman.

Dorothy Canfield Fisher, the first speaker, gave an interesting, provocative talk on the essential things for the health, happiness and development of children. "I rejoice to see experts of all kinds poking their noses into what has always been considered none of their business—the relation between parents and children. Of course it is everybody's business because everybody (whose other name is society) suffers or profits by the result of that relationship."

This wide-spread attention to the relationship between parent and child is going to lead not only to the improvement of conditions of childhood but to a demand for a better social order, for a more human industrial system. Parents are going to question the necessity of evils that formerly were considered unavoidable. "Every time we make an effort really to understand our children as well as to love them, it may be we are deepening the groove in the common consciousness of mankind along which runs the as yet dim conception that if we try to understand human beings we will know better how to help them than by merely trying to wish them well sentimentally."

Dr. Miriam Van Waters was the next speaker. She pointed out that the new freedom for young people did create difficulties for them. *We* are their problems. What are they going to do with us? Whenever we ask the question, "Is it possible to tell your parents the truth and get along?" the average young person is bewildered at the stupidity of thinking such a thing is possible. Youth is having to learn a new diplomacy, and this diplomacy is fatal to growth.

The degree to which freedom is good or bad for the child, depends upon the parent's philosophy. If the parent has confidence in the child and can give the child a sense of belonging, then freedom will not hurt. The greatest need we have today is for a guiding mind, a philosophy of life which children can respect.

Dr. C. W. Kimmins of London, England, described the effect of the new freedom for the child in several schools with which he was familiar. He said that the Dalton plan, allowing children absolute freedom in their choice of work, was in full use in many schools and that good discipline resulted, nevertheless.

Dr. Elton G. Mayo, the final speaker, emphasized the point that the real freedom is being able to order your own method.

The part which parents have to play in freedom for the child is to furnish a background of life. In the mentality of the child the events of the day occur against a background which is unknown. The parents should be there to reassure the child, to help him get rid of the fear which is not far from the mind of every child and to help him understand the reality and the safety of the world in which he lives.

A National Council of Parental Education

BECAUSE of a need for a clearing-house for the different agencies and projects in the field of parental education, the Child Study Association was enabled, through the generosity of the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial Fund, to call a round table conference at the Hotel Gramatan from October 19 to 26. Those present were:

Mrs. Ora Hart Avery, Supervisor of Home Economics Education, State Board of Education, Richmond, Va.; Mrs. W. W. Charters, Miss Alice M. Loomis, National Founders Association, 29 South La Salle St., Chicago, Ill.; Mrs. May Pardee Youtz, Iowa Child Welfare Research Station, State University of Iowa, Iowa City, Ia.; Miss Lois Hayden Meek, American Association of University Women, Washington, D. C.; Dr. Nellie L. Perkins, College of Home Economics, Cornell University, Ithaca, N. Y.; Dr. Miriam Van Waters, Referee, Juvenile Court, Los Angeles, Cal.; Dr. Jessie Taft, Director, Girls' Aid of Philadelphia, 311 South Juniper St., Philadelphia, Pa.; Miss Edna Noble White, Merrill Palmer School, Detroit; Miss Kate S. North, State Supervisor, Home Economics Education, Oklahoma; Mrs. Robbins Gilman, Executive Secretary, Women's Co-Operative Alliance, Minneapolis, Minn.; Miss Maud Morlock, Cleveland, Ohio, and from the Child Study Association Mrs. Howard Gans, Mrs. Sidonie M. Gruenberg, Mrs. Fred M. Stein and Mrs. Cecile Pilpel. As auditors: Mrs. Lewis Thompson, Dr. Ruth Andrus, Monmouth County Organization for Social Service; and Mrs. Marion M. Miller and Mrs. Daphne Drake of the Child Study Association.

The six days of the Conference were given to detailed explanations of the work of the different agencies which were represented as far as it related to parental education and a discussion of techniques and difficulties.

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At the close of the conference it was decided to make its benefits more lasting by organizing a National Council of Parental Education which should have a permanent secretary. The Child Study Association offered space in its Extension Office for the work of the Council.

Its expressed aims are as follows:

To assemble and make available research material for workers in the field.

To form a clearing house to which any person embarking on a project could find out whether this project is in any sense covered, to report plans of research.

To formulate qualifications and training of workers in the field of parental education and to keep informed of the best thought on that subject.

To collect and disseminate material other than on research.

The following officers were elected: *Chairman,* Miss Edna Noble White; *Committee on Organization; Chairman,* Miss Lois Hayden Meek; *Members,* Dr. Ruth Andrus, Dr. Miriam Van Waters. *Committee on Admissions; Chairman,* Mrs. Sidonie M. Gruenberg, Members, Dr. Nellie Perkins, Mrs. Robbins Gilman, Mrs. May Pardee Youtz, Mrs. Ora Hart Avery.

THE PARENT AND THE CHILD

(*Continued from page* 9)

Dr. Coe, after considering both the divisive and uniting aspects of religion, concluded that religion both unites and separates man; that the early experiences of children are capable of giving them a set in one or the other of these directions; that we cannot afford to let divisive forces have their own way, nor to ignore the power of religion to promote human unity; and finally that parents may have a large part in determining this issue.

Mrs. Anna Garlin Spencer gave the final address, voicing appreciation and sympathy for the parent. Among teachers it has become the habit to allude to parent as troubles or difficulties. After all, parents are a biological necessity. At their worst and least we must get along with them; at their most and best they educate their children to higher, finer and more enduring issues than any other influence can possibly achieve.

Dr. Elliott closed the Conference by reminding parents that moral conduct has an infinitely greater force in guiding the lives of children than a moral vocabulary, and that the spiritual growth of children will depend to a large extent on what their parents are.

THE FEARS OF CHILDHOOD

(*Continued from page* 4)

time of this first step in training Joe was in a bright, happy mood. At the sight of the animal there was an immediate quivering of the body, showing how much he was disturbed. With gentle insistence he was encouraged to look, his attention being called to the dog's color and movements. Day by day the re-education was carried on. As Joe's confidence developed the dog was brought closer, finally entering the room. Gradually the distance between the animal and the child was decreased until after three months Joe was induced to put out his hand and touch the dog's fur. This method of training produces the effect desired by those who recommend the heroic attitude. It does so by observing well known psychological laws. A new pathway is developed in the nervous system and substituted for the prevailing one.

A three-year-old girl had so great a terror of the dark that a psychologist was called in. She could not sleep; she could not be left alone. The parents professed entire ignorance of any causal factors, but continued questioning concerning their method of discipline brought out the fact that she had been frequently threatened with the dark closet, where something terrible would happen. The little girl was led to the window to look at the brightly shining moon, and while there the lights in the room were turned off. The moon fascinated her, so that she did not perceive that the lights had disappeared. As a cloud passed over the moon and the darkness deepened, she eagerly watched for the moon to reappear. After gazing for some time at it, she was led to bed and while still looking out of the window went to sleep. The next day she wanted to see the moon, and eagerly waited for night to come. This time as she was led into the room the lights were out, but she did not notice it. The attraction of the moon overcame her fear of darkness. A dominating interest had set up a form of reaction which effectively inhibited the fear response.

"Night terrors" are logical outcomes of mental processes which are suppressed or inhibited by the ordinary experiences of waking life. The child, fearing ridicule, will not betray his fear of the "great bear" or the "bogey man" when in association with his parents or companions. The presence of others is adequate to prevent those processes finding expression in overt behavior. In the hours of sleep the sights and sounds which prevent the expression of the feeling during the

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day are ineffective, and the child gives expression to his fear by screams of terror. The cure for night terrors is to be carried out in the daylight hours when the fundamental fears may be analyzed and the child's attitude readjusted.

A youth was greatly disturbed by his dreams of falling. During the day he worked on high buildings without any fear of disaster. At night he was frequently wakened by a "sudden lurch head foremost and the beginning of a fall to the ground." The beginning of this condition was traced to the training by his parents, who had filled him with fear by emphasizing the danger of climbing trees or the framework of buildings. When he found it necessary to do the things which he had been frightened about, his conscious control was sufficient for the day. But in the midnight hours, with normal controls released and the ordinary guides of waking life lost, the learned fears had full play and he met disasters which elsewhere never happened. When the cause of these dreams of falling was discovered and discussed with him, he realized its significance and followed the suggestion that he review the situation for himself before it was necessary for him to work on the scaffolds or other high places. Eventually he developed the same feeling of confidence on high places that he ordinarily had on the ground. In the course of a couple of months his distressing dreams entirely ceased.

In large measure the re-education of a child's attitude to eliminate fear can be carried on by parents or teachers. In some cases, particularly where the parents have themselves been responsible for the development of the fear, it may be impossible for them to effect a cure. When they are associated in the child's mind with the origin of the emotion, there is a neuro-psychological set against any suggestions coming from them. In such cases only failure can result from the corrective attempts of the parents. Usually time and experiment will soon tell whether they may be effective analysts and re-educators. When failure follows their efforts immediate recourse should be had to the psychologist trained in the analysis of children's problems and competent to carry on the readjustment.

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may be sent in advance for discussion at a conference on "The Fears of Childhood," to be led by Dr. Mitchell on February 17th, 1926. Address Dr. David Mitchell, care of "Child Study," 509 W. 121st St., N. Y. City.

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